# Vulnerable Patient Outreach in Emergencies, Optimizing Resources

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# Welcome

An overview of the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs process to assess and address unmet needs during emergency situations through the Vulnerable Patient Care, Access and Response during Emergencies (VP CARE) program. **Who, What, When, Where, Why and How**!

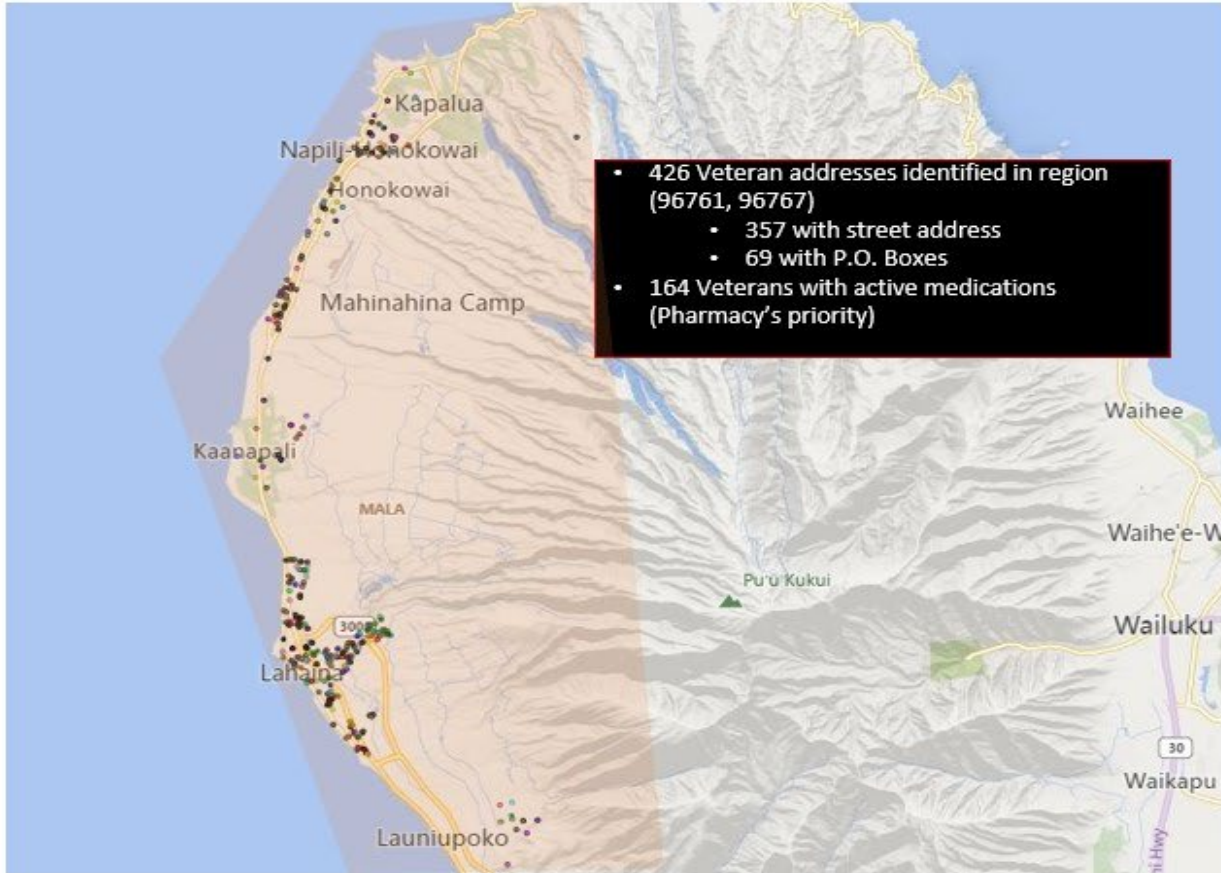California Hospital Association

# Objectives

1. Introduce the process used by VHA during emergencies to manage the needs of our vulnerable patient populations.

2. Define the baseline set of vulnerable patient categories.

3. Illustrate how outreach is conducted.

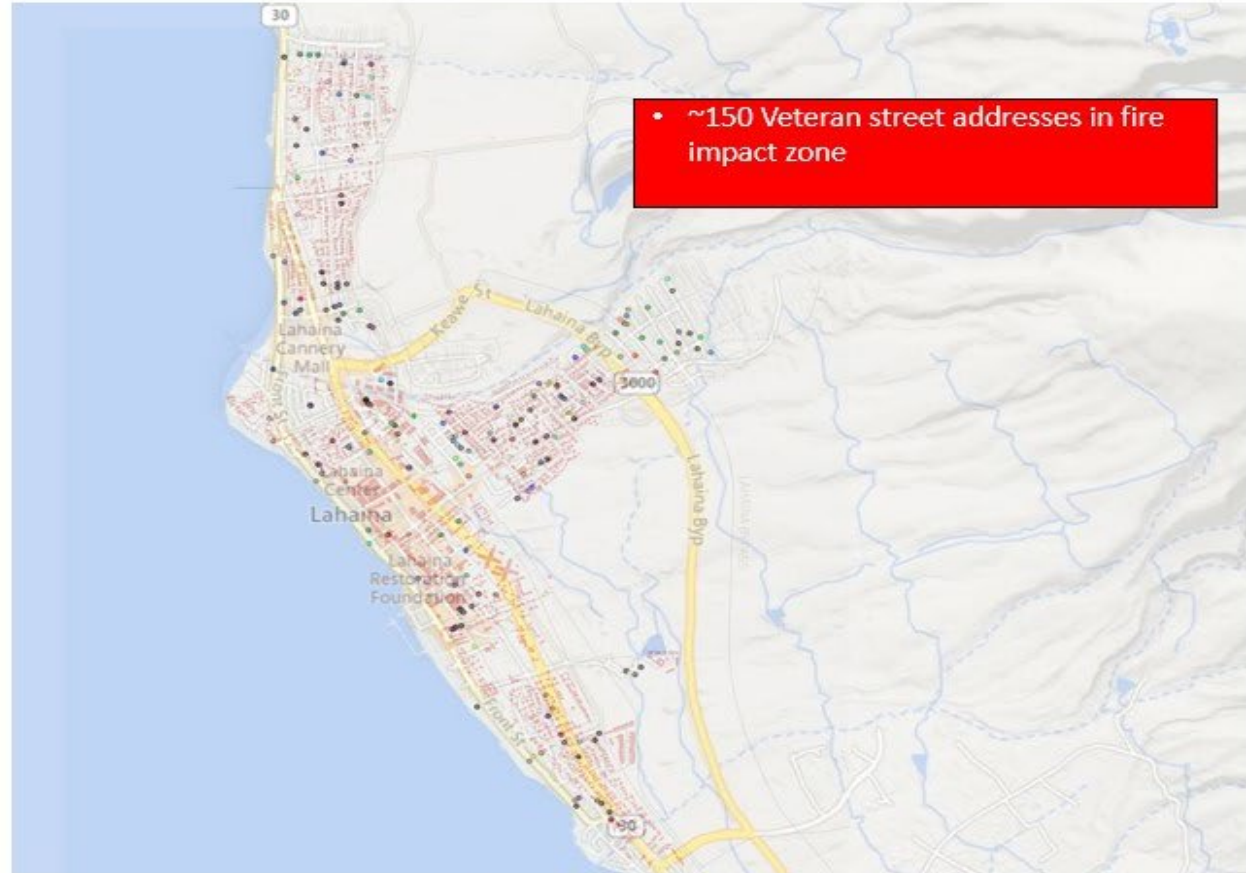4. Communicate the impact of patient outreach during emergencies on the continuity of their individual health care.

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# Disasters Can Impact Our Veterans Care

| Status | Updated: 8/12/23 @0850 | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Location | # of patients with active meds: | Contact Attempt made: | Unable to contact | Heritage | CBOC Fill | CMOP Fill | Local Fill | No intervention needed |
| Lahaina (96761, 96767) | 164 | 91 | 43 | 14 | 16 | 3 | 4 | 13 |



- 426 Veteran addresses identified in region (96761, 96767)
  - 357 with street address
  - 69 with P.O. Boxes
- 164 Veterans with active medications (Pharmacy's priority)

**Disaster Impact Region**



- ~150 Veteran street addresses in fire impact zone

**Lahaina Fire Impact Zone**

Feb. 14, 2021



Current Watches, Warnings, and Advisories

Blizzard Warning  Pop: 92
Ice Storm Warning  Pop: 2,974,261
Winter Storm Warning  Pop: 66,594,495
High Wind Warning  Pop: 30,360
Flood Warning  Pop: 50,675
Flood Warning  Pop: 518,386
Gale Warning  Pop: 24,766
Wind Chill Warning  Pop: 33,893,730
Hard Freeze Warning  Pop: 11,306,678
Freeze Warning  Pop: 1,639,906
Winter Weather Advisory  Pop: 79,886,973
Wind Chill Advisory  Pop: 48,025,474
Coastal Flood Advisory  Pop: 176,433
High Surf Advisory  Pop: 399,674
Small Craft Advisory  Pop: 255,235
Lake Wind Advisory  Pop: 170,172
Wind Advisory  Pop: 7,633,946
Winter Storm Watch  Pop: 18,837,693
Flash Flood Watch  Pop: 1,464,631
Flood Watch  Pop: 195,340
Wind Chill Watch  Pop: 3,905,072
Freezing Spray Warning  Pop: 4,249
Hard Freeze Watch  Pop: 3,046,311
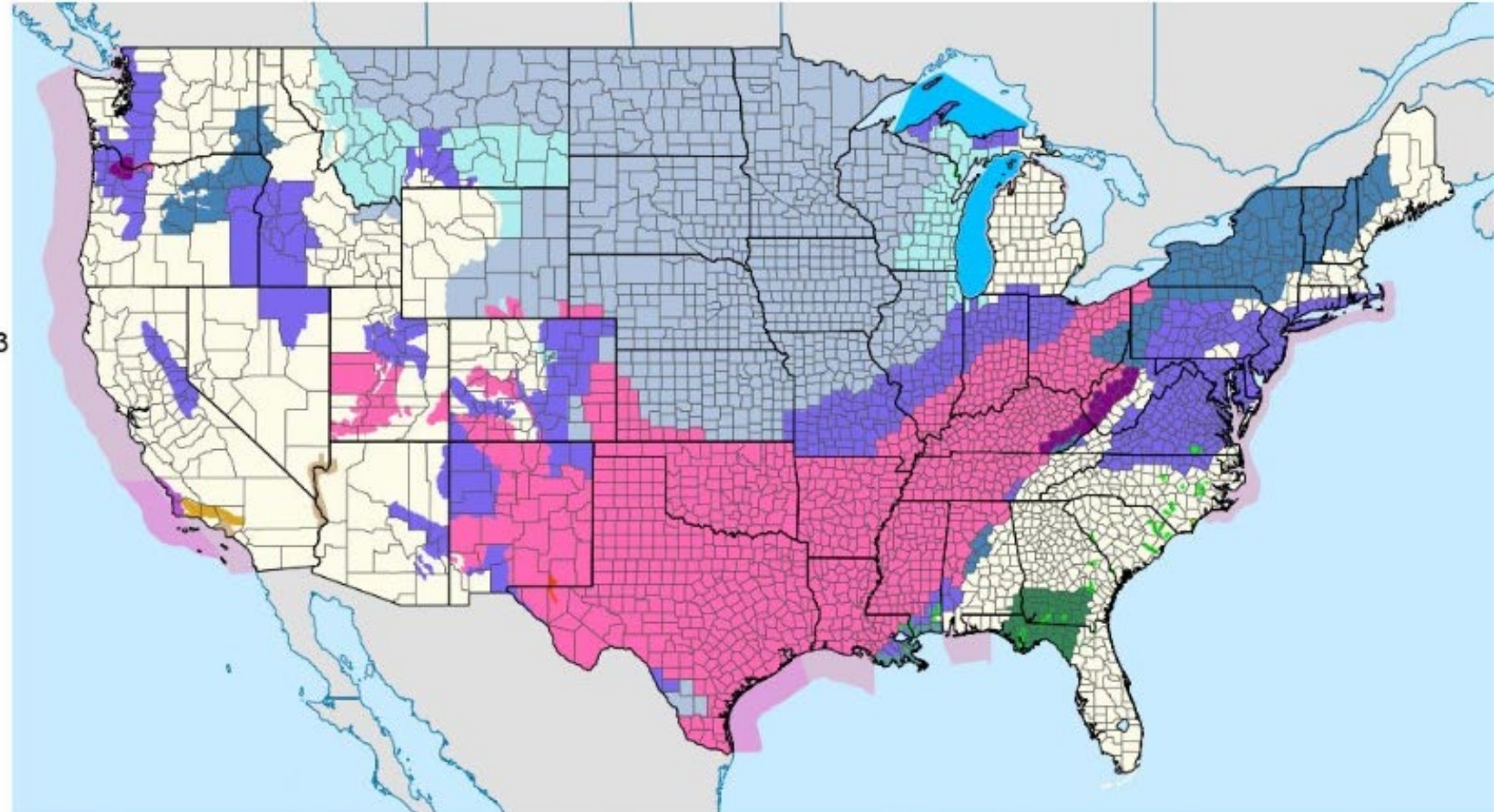
Graphic Created
February 14th, 2021
7:10 AM EST

Note: By 10 pm February 14, all counties in Texas were under winter weather warnings.

# **What** is VHA's VP CARE?

A collaborative between program offices that provides guidance and supporting technologies for line officials to ensure a consistent, enterprise-wide approach to outreach and assistance to vulnerable patients before, during, and after emergencies.

VP CARE is an evolving national standard in the U.S. health care industry that involves 3 capabilities:

1. Enhance the Readiness and Resilience of Patients and Caregivers
2. Establish an Organization, Policies, and Procedures to Guide Outreach and Assistance
3. Practice the Application of Core Processes and Technologies in Competency-based Training and Exercise

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# **When** is VP CARE used?

VP CARE is used before, during, and/or after emergency events. Choosing to conduct outreach to vulnerable patients is at the discretion of local VA leadership officials, or when VHA leadership requests it, based on the characteristics of the situation.

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# Examples of Emergency Events

A. Impacts to Transportation

B. Extreme Temperatures – NWS forecast of abnormally severe temperature extremes (i.e., heat or cold) within next 24 hours that may last for an extended period.

C. Unhealthy Air Quality (i.e., smog, plumes from wildfires, or hazardous materials releases) projected to affect VA medical facility operations and/or residents in the catchment area.

D. Availability of Facility Services:

    1. Loss of power, air conditioning, heat, potable, or wastewater systems.

    2. Staffing of a VA medical facility results in an impact to the delivery of health care.

    3. Pre-emptive closure of VA medical facility due to potential risk to staff and patients from the effects of a hazard.
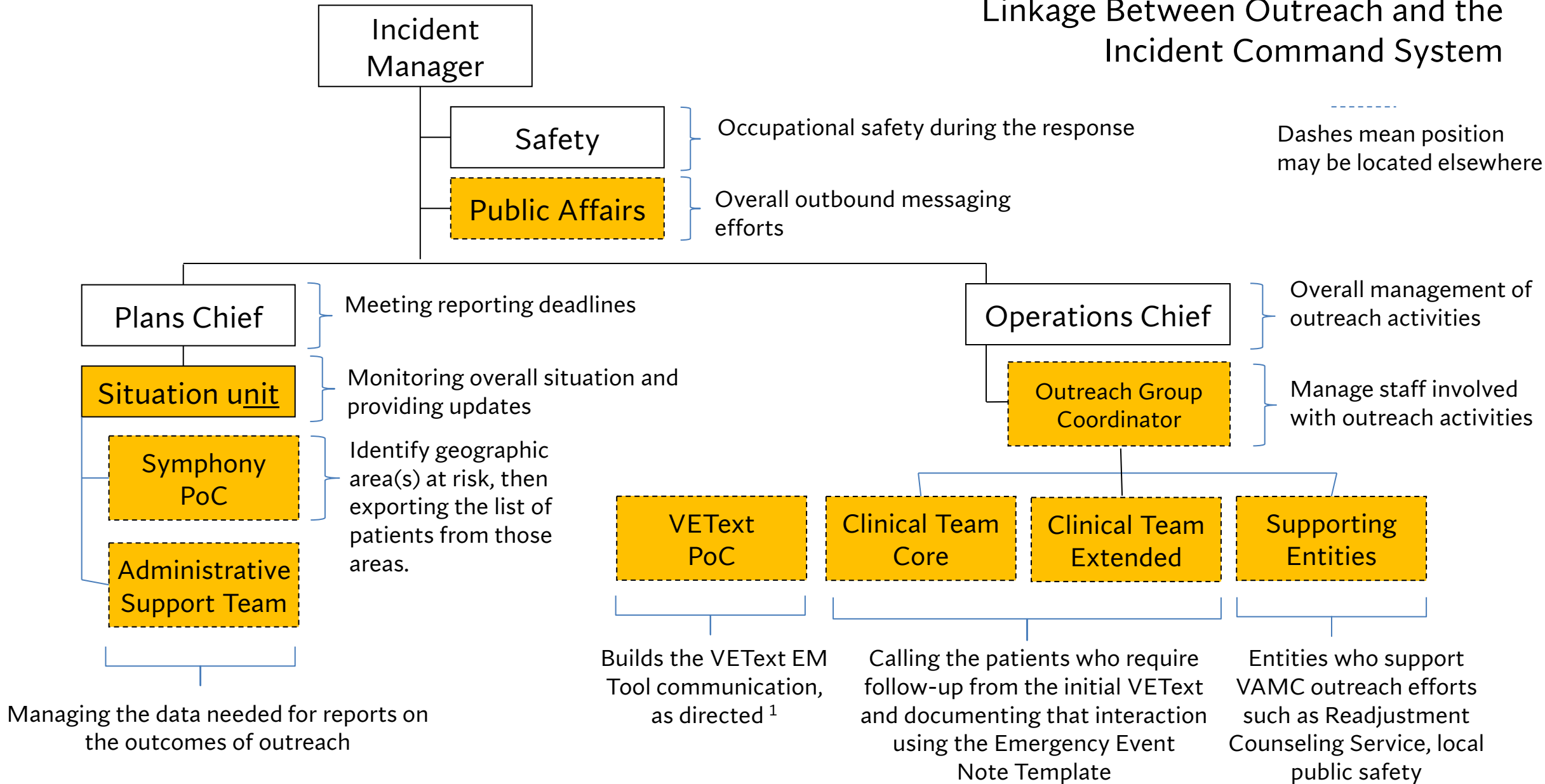
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# **Who** are we trying to reach?

| | |
|---|---|
| **Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC)** | **All HBPC patients contained in the HBPC mapping application** |
| **Home Oxygen** | All home oxygen patients under the care of a VA Provider. |
| **Homeless** | All patients enrolled in VA Homeless Programs |
| **Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)** | All SCI patients listed on the SCI Registry from Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders National Program. |
| **High Risk Mental Health 1** | Opioid Treatment Program (i.e., methadone treatment for opioid use disorder and Intensive Community Mental Health Recovery Program) patients. |
| **High Risk Mental Health 2** | All patients with a High Risk for Suicide Flag, which indicates a record flag has been placed in the VA health record suggesting the Veteran is currently considered at risk for suicide. |
| **Dialysis** | All dialysis patients undergoing VA-provided dialysis in Outpatient Hemodialysis Dashboard. |
| **Fee Basis Dialysis** | Veterans receiving dialysis services in the community, *identified via the VSSC referral cube database as patients with active non-VA dialysis service referrals.* |
| **Chemo/Infusion** | All patients receiving chemotherapy from VA *as identified via chemotherapy prescription codes provided by Pharmacy Benefits Management.* |
| **Level 1 Telehealth** | "High Priority" Home Telehealth patients *as identified by the office of connected care extracted from the home telehealth contractor's database.* |

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# **Who** is involved in the outreach process?

- **Health system leaders (i.e., Directors, Deputy Directors, Associate Directors):** decision-making
- **Public Affairs Officers**: syncing messaging and content
- **Emergency Management Specialists**: situational awareness, advising leadership, coordination of the response and recovery, reporting
- **Outreach Coordinators (i.e., program managers, leads, service chiefs):** manage outreach effort for their respective cohorts
  - Symphony PoC – use Symphony to identify the patients
  - VEText PoC – use VEText to contact the patients
  - Outreach teams:
    - Local program clinicians for all cohorts (i.e., social workers, medical assistants, nurses, doctors) – Use Emergency Event Note Template to document telephone contact

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# Linkage Between Outreach and the Incident Command System



Incident Manager

Safety — Occupational safety during the response

Public Affairs — Overall outbound messaging efforts

Dashes mean position may be located elsewhere

Plans Chief — Meeting reporting deadlines

Situation unit — Monitoring overall situation and providing updates

Symphony PoC — Identify geographic area(s) at risk, then exporting the list of patients from those areas.

Administrative Support Team

Managing the data needed for reports on the outcomes of outreach

Operations Chief — Overall management of outreach activities

Outreach Group Coordinator — Manage staff involved with outreach activities

VEText PoC — Builds the VEText EM Tool communication, as directed [1]

Clinical Team Core
Clinical Team Extended — Calling the patients who require follow-up from the initial VEText and documenting that interaction using the Emergency Event Note Template

Supporting Entities — Entities who support VAMC outreach efforts such as Readjustment Counseling Service, local public safety

[1] The VEText EM Tool offers 1-way and a 2-way message templates. 1-way messages are used for *Advisories*. 2-way messages are used for *Emergencies*.

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# **Where** are we conducting outreach?

A key advantage of the VP CARE process and technologies is that it provides a focused, situational, location-based outreach. Instead of conducting an outreach to the entire market area of a hospital, the Symphony tool allows for patient identification within an event boundary.

# Prioritizing Outreach in Large Impacted Areas

Immediate Threat Areas

– Preservation of life

– Focused aid to a concentrated group of people

– Prevent spreading of impacts to broader population

– Relieve or reduce immediate impacts

Areas of secondary impacts

– Support System Failure Areas (Utilities, Community Systems, Stabilizers)

Support Areas

– Evacuation Receiving Areas

– Resource Areas

**Messaging may need to vary based on these areas**

# **How** does VP CARE work?

- Triggers/Decision Guide
- Standardized process description
  - Pre-impact and Post-impact
- Supporting technologies:
  - Symphony (vulnerable patient application) – 2 aspects:
    - Defines the geographic area(s) at risk or those in which outreach will occur
    - Pulls data on vulnerable patients living in those areas for use in contacting them
  - VEText Emergency Management Tool:
    - 1-way messaging – for sending advisory messages
    - 2-way messaging – for the first phase of outreach contact
  - Emergency Event Note Template (*Electronic Health Record-ERH*)
    - Documents the interaction between VA staff and patients and/or caregivers
  - Integrated PowerBI Report – summarizes the VEText 2-way and Note Template data

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# VP CARE Technologies

## VP CARE leverages existing VHA technology to:
- Enhance the readiness and resilience of patients and caregivers
- Establish organization policies and procedures to guide outreach and assistance
- Practice the application of core processes and technologies in competency-based training and exercises

**1. Symphony Geospatial Map**
**Function:** Map overlay with event layers, catchment area, and VP CARE Veterans
**End-User:** Emergency Managers/Group Practice Managers (Designee)

**1. Symphony Map-Free Report**
**Function:** State & county report used to identify of VP CARE Veterans
**End-User:** Emergency Managers/Group Practice Managers (Designee)
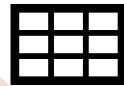
**3. Vulnerable Patient VEText Messaging Report**
**Function:** Prioritized response report to conduct outreach and document contact
**End-User:** Outreach Coordinator

**5. VP CARE Outcomes Report**
**Function:** Provides roll-up report of outreach activity
**End-User:** Emergency Managers/Group Practice Managers (Designee) Outreach Coordinators/Executive Leadership Team/VISN/OEM/Watch Office

## VP CARE Technology

**2. VEText Emergency Management Tool**
**Function:** Mass alert notification system to Veterans
**End-User:** VEText Coordinator (Designee)/Group Practice Managers (Designee)

**4. Vulnerable Patient Emergency Event Note**
**Function:** EHR template to document outreach and needs
**End-User:** Outreach Coordinator

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## Preparing to Conduct Outreach

**Preparing**
- Review and revise seasonal preparedness and cohort-specific message templates for outreach.
- Contact vulnerable patients to update information and explain how outreach will occur during emergencies.
- Coordinate with community human service organizations to clarify roles, responsibilities, and services available during emergencies.

**Organizing**
- Validate/identify variations in vulnerable patient lists by comparing those identified in local lists vs. the lists from Symphony.
- Determine the staffing, location/space, equipment, and supplies that will be used for outreach activities.
- Develop a SOP to guide outreach activities.

**Staffing**
- For those who will manage lists of patients (PHI, PII), obtain the appropriate access to Symphony (consider depth of staffing).
- For those who will use VEText 2-way messaging for outreach, obtain access to that application (consider depth of staffing).
- Maintain a roster of staff who will support outreach activities.

**Training**
- Train staff who will be assigned to support outreach on the SOP.
- Conduct tabletop and functional exercises to practice roles and data management.

## Conducting Outreach & Follow-up

**Initiation**
- Monitor conditions and authoritative source alerts.
- Advise leadership of impending conditions and triggers – obtain approval to initiate outreach.
- Alert staff involved with outreach activities.
- Organize staff and conduct briefing on outreach process.

**Pre-impact**
- Coordinate outreach efforts, coordination among involved service lines.
- Resolve issues related to organization, staffing, systems, or process.
- Consolidate results of outreach into reports for leadership.
- Brief leadership on outreach activities, types of assistance requested and issues.
- Identify safety issues related to face-to-face welfare checks/assistance for those patients who cannot be contacted.
- Make recommendations to leadership on whether VA should send staff or request assistance from public safety authorities.

**Post-impact**
- Monitor conditions to adjust outreach posture (surge, sustain current levels, or demobilize).
- Report results of outreach.
- Manage demobilization of outreach activities.

**After Action Review**
- Determine process & outcome findings from VEText & EHRM data.
- Conduct after action reviews with outreach staff to identify issues needing corrective.
- Brief leadership on corrective actions.
- Carry out corrective actions.

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# Symphony

Select the COOP layers you would like to enable and click **Apply**.

Note that some layers may take up to 60 seconds to render depending on network performance. Also, vector basemaps will significantly slow the rendering of the map.

## Epidemiology
☐ ICU Beds & Capacity
☐ Med/Surg Beds & Capacity

## Radar & Rainfall
☐ Radar
☐ Excessive Rainfall Probability Forecast
☐ River Forecast Center Quantitative Precipitation Estimates (Last 1 hour)

## Flooding
☐ NWS Significant River Flooding Outlook
☐ NWS AHPS Observed River Stages
☐ FEMA Flood Hazard Zones
☐ NOAA Coastal Flood Exposue Map

## Power Outages
☐ Power Outages
☐ California Power Outages (CA only) 🍃

## Fire
☐ Current Fire Points
☑ Current Fire Perimeters
☐ Smoke Forecast (approx +1hr)

## Hurricane
☐ Predicted Hurricane Track

## Earthquake & Tsunami
☐ USGS Recent Seismic Events

## Tornado Watches & Warnings
☐ NWS Active Tornado Watches & Warnings

## Other Watches & Warnings
☐ NWS Active Other Watches & Warnings

## Staging & Shelters
☐ FEMA Open Shelters

## Historical Tornados (last 7 days)
☐ Tornado Touchdown Points (last 7 days) 🍃

## Other Geography Layers
☐ Congressional Districts *(long load time)*
☐ Catchment Areas
☐ Counties
☐ ZIP Codes
☐ CBOCs

# Patient List
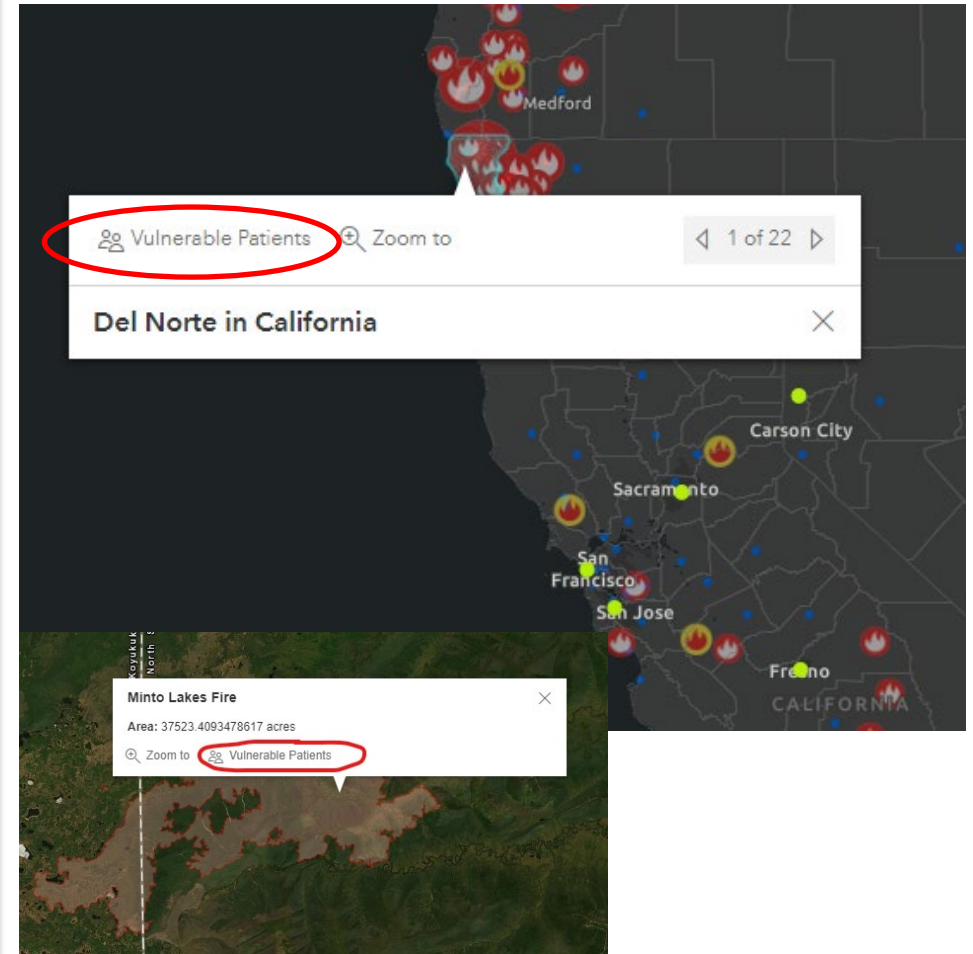
# VEText 2-way Messaging



- Automated process with tracking

- Two-way Communication

- Prioritization



53079
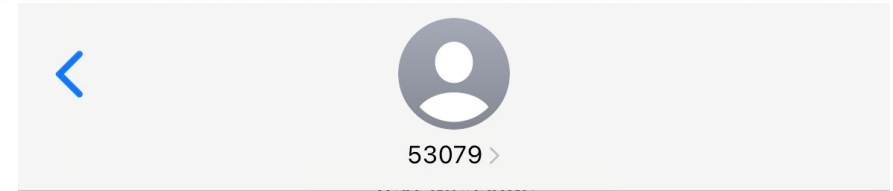
Text Message
Today 10:11 AM

This is the Department of Veterans Affairs.

You may be impacted by the following emergency in your area: Exercise Ice Storm 12/2022

Please reply:

Y7 if you are impacted and require assistance

N8 if you do not need assistance at this time

Reply STOP to end messages.

N8

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# VEText Response Report

# Vulnerable Veteran Emergency Event Template

- Health Factor tracking

- Documentation of resources requested, and actions taken

- RVU generation (CPT: 98966; 0.25)

- Linked to an automated Data Roll-Up report for final counts



VULNERABLE PATIENT EMERGENCY EVENT NOTE VERSION 1.1

++ Purpose: To provide a standardized format for outreach to Vulnerable patients as directed in Vulnerable Patient Care, Access, and Response in Emergencies (VP CARE) guidance.

Who: To be used by any clinical staff before, during or after an emergency event. ++

Outreach Type:

Choose One
- ◯ Pre-Impact
- ◯ During
- ◯ Post-Impact

Type of Emergency Event

- ☐ Natural Disaster/Weather Event:
- ☐ Hazardous Material
- ☐ Infectious Disease
- ☐ Utility Outage Event:
- ☐ Acts of Terrorism
- ☐ Other:

Vulnerable Veteran Cohort

- ☐ Chemo/Infusion
- ☐ Dialysis
- ☐ High Risk Mental Health 1 Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Program
- ☐ High Risk Mental Health 2 High Risk for Suicide Flag
- ☐ Home Oxygen
- ☐ Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC)
- ☐ Homeless
- ☐ Level 1 Telehealth
- ☐ Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

# Outcomes (Data Roll-up) Dashboard



Date Range Response Rates
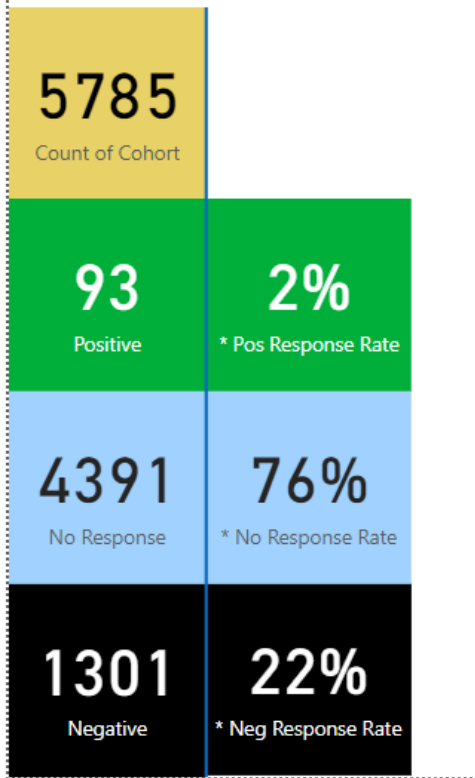
# Things to consider when conducting outreach...

- Understanding the cohort population is key to a successful outreach. Local program managers know their patients best.

- Emergencies impact not only community resources but health care resources. This may affect capacity to conduct outreach.

- Nothing prevents VISNs/facilities from conducting outreach to other patient cohorts or to all Veterans.

- Safety of the staff always comes first. Situational awareness should guide decision to engage staff in home visits.

- Many contract services provide emergency outreach services.

- Coordination among cohorts as well as contract services and community partners is key to avoid duplication of efforts.

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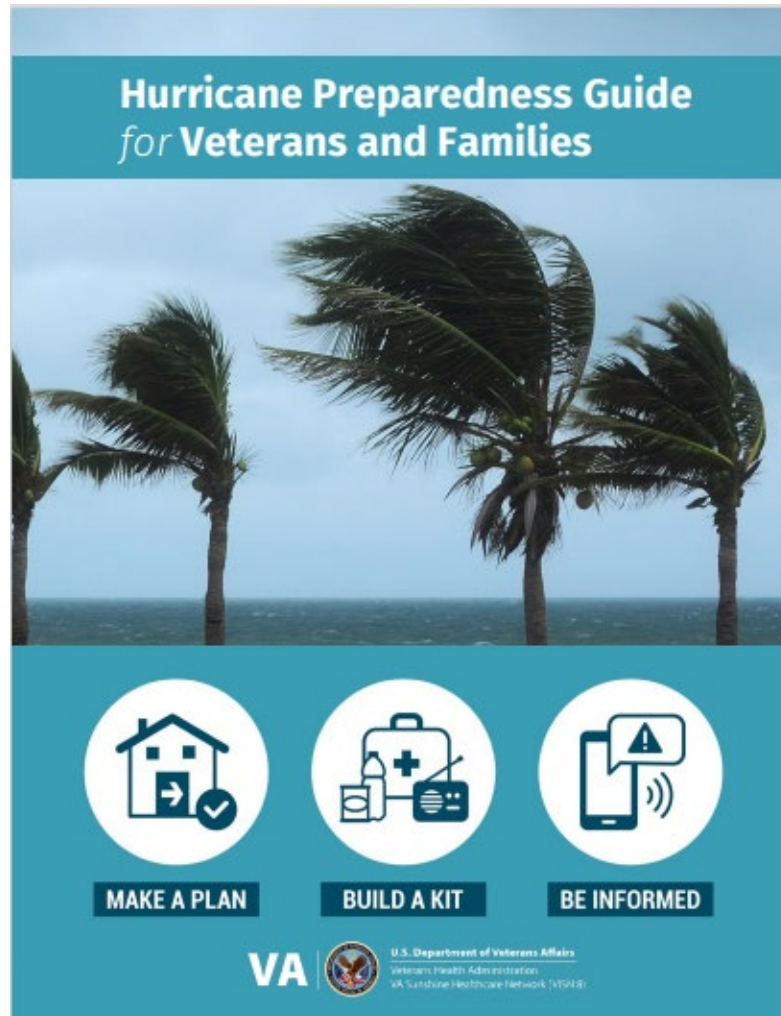
# Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC) – A Best Practice

Veterans Emergency Evaluation Center (VEMEC) created a [toolkit](#) for HBPC programs to use when developing their local programs with a cross walk to The Joint Commission Standards for Emergency Management.

Preparedness: Upon admission, emergency planning begins.

- Education for emergency preparation for geographic appropriate scenarios (hurricane, tornado, wildfires, extreme heat/cold, etc.)
- Forms provided for local special needs shelters and transportation to shelters
- Emergency plan is documented
  - Risk Priority Assessment (High 24h, Moderate 48h, Low 3 days or more).
    - High risk are identified for potential planned inpatient bed

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# Sample on Preparedness



## Emergency preparedness

Emergency preparedness resources to assist Veterans before, during and after a hurricane or other emergencies.

| Make an appointment | View all health services | Register for care |

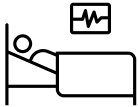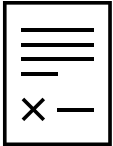### On this page

↓ Make a Plan   Build a Kit   Be Informed

↓ Hurricane Preparedness

↓ Make a Plan

↓ Know your Watches and Warnings

↓ Before, During and After a Hurricane

↓ Resources (National, Federal, State, and more)

↓ Other emergencies

↓ Health Information Card

# **Why** do we conduct outreach to vulnerable patients during emergencies?

- Ethical duty

- The VA is committed to our Veterans

- Positive health impact to maintain the continuity of care for our most vulnerable Veterans

- Visibility for leadership at all levels

- Effective resource utilization and management by Health Care Systems: *ER visits, Home O2, Prosthetics, Home Care*
  - TJC: EM 12.02.05 Plan for care during emergency...

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# Return on Investment

- Cancelled Appointments ($$$)

- Clinician Workload Capture and Credit ($$$)

- Emergency Room/Urgent Care Outside of Network ($$$)

- Vendor Contracts ($$$)

- Health of Population Served

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# Questions

# Thank you

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